

Hailey Johnson, 15, was born in Ocala, Florida, and raised in Port Charlotte, Florida. She atteneded an Episcable school by the name of Good Shepherd for 13 years. At the age of three, Hailey’s brother, Torrin, was born. Her parents were supportive of her life decisions, and have had an impact on the person she is today. In her essay, Hailey contemplates the contridictory opinions she received throughout her life from various influences, and how those opinions have also shaped who she is today.

Growing up Conflicted

By: Hailey Johnson



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 hat do you want to be when you grow up? Throughout our lives, from the time we are able to communicate verbally, we are asked this question. Quite often the response changes. Peer pressure, migration to various areas, and society are responsible for the fluctuating answers. Most of us would answer the question with what we are currently interested in at that point in time. When a child is asked this question, they answer truthfully. Often, they are told to choose something realistic, something that makes a lot of money, something “normal.” Their response can wreck dreams and futures. We currently live in a world where conformity is forced upon us from the time we are young, until the time we breathe our last breath. I have begun to see more and more children whose ideas and opinions of their world are being called taboos because they are not what the rest of the world thinks they should believe, or do. Taboos are highly thought of, and, when one is broken or rebelled against, it demands punishment from peers. We are told to express ourselves, but at the same time be “normal.” What is normal? Is there a true definition to normal? According to *Psychology Today*, “to constrain normality is to induce conformity." Being told to be normal is, in a sense, being told to conform.

 I grew up attending an Episcopal school where I was forced to conform every day. We wore the same uniforms day in and day out, a navy blue polo shirt and a pair of khakis. We were also told to choose some career that had a high income, or something that could change the world for everyone. Conformity like this is seen in schools and workplaces all around the world. Why do they want us to all be alike? Some say that conformity, like uniforms, make kids behave or make people look more professional. But, is this all it does?

In *The Trouble with School Uniforms*, Alfie Kohn asks a very important critical thinking question. Can violence and inappropriate behaviors be changed by adopting an idea that originates from the military? Schools that enforce uniforms and conformity utilize a tactic taught by the military to display the presence of a hierarchy, much like what is seen in schools – a dominance of one over another. Schools are teaching children that it is better to be alike rather to be different. The promotion of individualism seems to be lacking and the development of their own mores and values prohibited.

I grew up in a nuclear family who shared opposing beliefs compared to my school. Throughout my life, my parents have always been supportive of my choices and have always promoted individualism. I have known since a very young age that my future career would involve the animal science field. My parents accepted this, and even promoted it. While writing this paper, I realized that they likely promoted it, not just because it was what I wanted to do, but because they saw a job that would make a decent salary, and would benefit my future and theirs, substantially.

I know friends and family who did not grow up the same way as I did. They were forced into their jobs, or in my parent’s case, they were forbidden to attend college, and apply for a real job. Luckily, today there are not many families in society who forbid the amazing opportunities offered to today’s youth. My mother was prohibited to attend college because her father refused to sign the appropriate paperwork. Due to the unfair treatment she was subjected to, she became open minded, and helped me embrace all of the unique opportunities she was never given.

*Cultural Relativism* is a sociological term that means, to look at things from a different perspective. If people do not look at things from different perspectives, they will never understand the effects of their actions or words on the future of others. Imagine being told time and time again that what you aspire to be is not “normal,” or you will never amount to anything. There are people who wonder why their children grow up to be a disappointment; and, they consider every other factor or reason but themselves.

Those years of being forced to conform, but being encouraged to be an individual helped shape the person I am today. I am someone who can accept conformity, to a degree, when it is a necessity, but who also is a huge supporter of individualism and respecting peoples’ volitions. Next time you are asked what you would prefer to be when you *grow up*, are you going to answer based on what you want, or the idea of what society and your peers want? Why let someone who gave up on their dreams or crushed other peoples’ dreams talk you out of going after yours? Personally, I would have answered this with the most unique response I could come up with, because that is who I am. If that is not you, and you would rather blend in then stand out, that is fine too, because that is who you are and not a single person can change that, or take it away. Your future lies in your hands, but is effected by the hands of others.

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